

THE NEWS-ENTERPRISE**Thursday, December 07, 2006****IACH plans improvements by using comment cards***By JERRY MERIDETH/Community Relations Chief*

Ireland Army Community Hospital

Three simple questions are being used to gauge patient satisfaction with service at Ireland Army Community Hospital.

“Overall, how satisfied do you feel about your visit with your provider today?”

“How would you rate the amount of time you waited at the clinic to see the health care provider?”

“How would you rate the courtesy and helpfulness of our staff during this visit?”

Each question is tied to a rating, circled by patients, of “poor,” “fair,” “good,” “very good,” or “excellent” on a new hospital comment card that allows patients to voice concerns at the front desk. Patients pick up the comment card when they check into an Ireland clinic. They hand the card back after their appointment.

Ireland’s target is an “excellent” or “very good” rating in each of the categories.

Not just another piece of paper, the Ireland customer scorecard bears a color likeness of the hospital in a vertical, buck-slip format. The back of the form has space for written comments. Entries for name and phone number are included, but that information is not required unless patients want a hospital representative to call about their concerns.

The goal is to spur interaction between the patient with the care provider and front desk, to ensure that health care beneficiaries receive the care they need and deserve.

Participation is optional for patients. However, hospital leaders want Soldiers, retirees, and family members to know that it’s their right to be heard and get the care they deserve. The hospital scorecard allows patients to be heard—quickly.

Ireland is revamping its customer service program as the Army community hospital moves toward the new year. Hospital Commander Col. Steven Braverman addresses the topic of customer service at meetings with hospital staff members. He tells Ireland service providers they can do better when it comes to meeting the needs of health care beneficiaries.

“We need to treat every individual with dignity and respect,” Braverman said. “Our mission is to provide quality care and customer service while promoting a healthy and ready force.”

The hospital scorecard is a companion to the survey mailed to patients by the U.S. Army Medical Command within two weeks of an appointment. Customer service across the North Atlantic Regional Medical Command is receiving added emphasis. The MEDCOM survey is called the AMEDD (Army Medical Department) Provider Level Satisfaction Survey. Results of the survey are tabulated each month and provided to military hospitals in the region, including Fort Drum, N.Y., Walter Reed Army

Medical Center in Washington, D.C., and Ireland Hospital at Fort Knox.

Customer comments collected at NARMC and Ireland target patient concerns. That data allows officials to monitor trends and correct or improve service.

At Ireland, customer service is a regular part of briefings, a newcomer's orientation, and a council that meets monthly to identify new strategies to improve how hospital staff members greet patients and ensure they receive the care they deserve.

Ireland Department of Nursing Chief Col. Rhonda Earls chairs the hospital customer service committee. She reminds health care providers that patient care begins with simple courtesy.

"Good customer service means we're taking care of our patients," Earls said. "Our patients are ill, injured, or recovering. Being able to smile, say hello, and listening to their concerns are important part of patient care."

Ireland officials plan to make the Fort Knox hospital the best in the command in terms of customer service. To plan improvements, hospital leaders are asking for patients to take the time to complete a comment card in the clinic and to mail back the AMEDD survey.

Even if they're satisfied with their care and treatment, patients should fill out the Ireland and AMEDD surveys.

"We want to prevent response bias when we tabulate our data, so we can get a true picture of how we're doing," said Dr. Braverman. "Too often, customers with complaints fill out the surveys, while those who had good experiences don't bother."

Reports of good patient care allow hospital officials to commend staff members who are taking care of patients as they move from the front desk to the pharmacy.